

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3668

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTIAGO 4000

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, CI

SUBJECT: CHILEAN GOVERNMENT CANCELS WASHINGTON POST

CORRESPONDENT'S ACCREDITATION

1. SUMMARY. AFTERNOON "MERCURIO" CHAIN RIGHTIST TABLOIS "LA SEGUNDA" JUNE 19 QUOTES FONMINISTRY DIRECTOR GENERAL SAYING GOC HAS CANCELLED ACCREDITATION OF BUENOS AIRES-BASED "WASHINGTON POST" CORRESPONDENT JOANNE OMANG FOR "SCANDALOUS CONDUCT OF A PROFESSIONAL NATURE." FONMINISTRY PRESS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR CONFIRMED ACTION, BUT PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY CLAIMED HE WAS UNAWARE OF IT. BOTH DESCRIBED MOVE AS A MISTAKE BUT BELIEVE OMANG CAN STILL ENTER CHILE BUT BE EXCLUDED FROM ALL GOC CONTACTS. END SUMMARY.

2. "LA SEGUNDA" STORY SAYS OMANG "RECEIVED ALL SORTS OF ATTENTION, INCLUDING GRANTING OF FACILITATIVE ASSISTANCE TO CARRY OUT HER MISSION." ADDS "OMANG 'ADORNED' HER STORIES WITH SERIES OF PERSONAL REMARKS ON PRESIDENT OF REPUBLIC, GENERAL AUGUSTO PINOCHET, WHOM SHE INTERVIEWED. OMANG'S STORIES WERE UTILIZED BY WASHINGTON POST EXACTLY AT TIME OASGA WAS GOING TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN CHILE. SOME OF THE STORIES REFERRED TO SUPPOSED ACCUSIONS OF 'TORTURE' IN OUR COUNTRY WITHOUT THE CASES BEING VERIFIED."

3. FONMINISTRY PRESS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS DIRECTOR CARLOS
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ASHTON TOLD AMBOFF CANCELLATION WAS MADE BY GOC OFFICE OF

SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS (DIRRECCION DE COMUNICACION SOCIAL) ON ORDERS FROM ABOVE BECAUSE "PINOCHET GOT VERY ANGRY--FURIOUS--WITH OMANG" OVER HER VERSION OF INTERVIEW WITH HIM. ASHTON AT FIRST TRIED TO PASS MOVE OFF AS OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE ("IT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING..."). UNDER QUESTIONING SAID HE "THINKS" OMANG CAN STILL ENTER CHILE "BUT NOT AS A JOURNALIST." SAID HE "DIDN'T KNOW" IF OMANG WOULD BE ABLE TO FILE STORIES BUT WAS SURE SHE WOULD NOT BE GIVEN ANY GOC INTERVIEWS OR ACCESS TO GOC INFORMATION OR INDIVIDUALS. ASHTON OPENED UP GRADUALLY AND SAID HE PERSONALLY AND ON EMOTIONAL PLANE FAVORED T ACTION BECAUSE OF HIS OWN UNHAPPY EXPERIENCES WITH OMANG IN PAST. HOWEVER, HE SAID, LOOKING AT ACTION DISPASSIONATELY HE CONSIDERS IT A MISTAKE. ASHTON ELABORATED, SAYING HE HAD CONFRONTED OMANG WITH ALLEGED FALSEHOODS IN HER USE OF INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM ASHTON, TO WHICH OMANG REPORTEDLY REPLIED THAT ASHTON "DIDN'T SAY IT, BUT EXPRESSED IT IN YOUR EYES." ASHTON DESCRIBED THIS AS LESS THAN OBJECTIVE OR PROFESSIONAL AND SAID HE HAD ALREADY TOLD HER PERSONALLY THAT HIS DOOR WAS CLOSED TO HER BECAUSE SHE "DOESN'T DESERVE MY CONFIDENCE. I TOLD HER, 'DON'T CALL ME EVER AGAIN; I'M NOT INTERESTED IN TALKING TO YOU.'" ASHTON ADMITTED HE KNEW CANCELLATION WAS COMING TWO OR THREE WEEKS AGO ON ORDERS FROM ABOVE. (HE LEFT NO DOUBT HE MEANT PINOCHET.) ASHTON ADDED THAT HE THOUGHT IT WAS MISTAKE FOR MINISTRY'S SECRETARY GENERAL TO ANNOUNCE IT IN WEEKLY PRESS CONFERENCE AND HAD SO TOLD HIM AFTER THE FACT. IT WAS MISTAKE, ASHTON SAID, BECAUSE IT WAS NOT FONMINISTRY ACTION. ASHTON SAID ONLY OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES AND CANCELS PRESS CREDENTIALS, NOT ASHTON'S OFFICE.

4. PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY FEDERICO WILLOUGHBY TOLD EMBOFF HE WAS UNAWARE OF THIS ACTION BUT "WOULD CONSIDER IT VERY UNWISE AND AM OPPOSED. THE PRESIDENT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS. GOC POLICY IS NOT TO KEEP JOURNALISTS OUT OF CHILE, EVEN IF THEY ARE NOT ACCREDITED. I PERSONALLY GUARANTEE TO SEE TO IT THAT ANY JOURNALIST WHO WANTS TO COME INTO CHILE WILL BE ALLOWED TO, AS I HAVE DONE IN PAST." UNDER QUESTIONING, WILLOUGHBY DREW DISTINCTION BETWEEN PERMISSION TO ENTER CHILE AND ACCREDITATION, NOTING THAT EVEN IF GOC POLICY IS TO LET ALL CORRESPONDENTS ENTER COUNTRY, FONMINISTRY (SIC) DECIDES WHO CONFIDENTIAL

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GETS ACCREDITED. WILLOUGHBY ADMITTED LACK OF ACCREDITATION WOULD HAMPER NEWSMEN'S WORK AT LEAST BY KEEPING THEM OUT OF FONMINISTRY AND OTHER OFFICIAL GOC BUILDINGS AND FUNCTIONS.

5. COMMENT: OMANG ARTICLES FROM LAST VISIT PRESENTED PINOCHET IN VERY UNFAVORABLE LIGHT. SINCE ASHTON SAYS HE WAS AWARE OF DECISION TO CANCEL CREDENTIALS TWO OR THREE WEEKS AGO, WE PRESUME IT WAS TAKEN IN IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF APPEARANCE

HER ARTICLES EVEN THOUGH ONLY ANNOUNCED TODAY. BOTH WILLOUGHBY AND ASHTON, IN THEIR MORE RATIONAL MOMENTS, REALIZE THIS STEP IS A MISTAKE. IN TIME THEIR VIEWS MAY PREVAIL IN OMANG CASE. GOC HAS REACTED IMPETUOUSLY TO US CORRESPONDENTS PREVIOUSLY BUT HAS ULTIMATELY RELENDED, E.G., IN NOVITSKY (WASHINGTON POST) AND KANDELL (N.Y.TIMES) CASES. HOWEVER, OMANG CASE MORE DIFFICULT SINCE PINOCHET IMAGE INVOLVED. POPPER

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